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MY VIEW: GREG PORTER

Step up to plate to fund remediation

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Despite The Star's editorial on Oct. 10 ("Educational spring forward doesn't fall to ISTEP alone") proclaiming that the recent overhaul of our current ISTEP testing system was "long overdue," the debate over spring versus fall ISTEP testing was a genuine one.

There are various issues at stake just as important as tracking the short-term performance of students and educators through testing in the spring. One is assessing students' long-term retention in the fall. Another is assessing all academic standards taught, even those learned at the end of the school year. A third is developing a test to assess higher-order thinking skills, which is at least as important as developing a test that can be graded quickly.

Despite the extensive debate surrounding this issue, the wrangling and hand-wringing have missed what I believe is the real point of giving these tests in the first place -- helping children succeed academically.

Over the years, virtually none of the bills offered by proponents of spring ISTEP testing included an appropriation (or any language, for that matter) supporting increased summer remediation programs for students identified by the test as needing additional assistance.

In just the past decade, state spending on ISTEP increased dramatically, reaching \$31 million in 2007. The governor announced that administering ISTEP in the spring would cost less than administering the test in fall. However, these reported costs do not include the myriad diagnostic tests the State Board of Education has promised will become a part of their new testing system. Furthermore, it is still unclear who will pay for the two tests (fall and spring) that will be given in 2008.

Compare that to funding trends for remediation programs. It is not an overstatement to say that the bottom literally fell out in funding for K-9 remediation, going from a high of nearly \$23 million in 2004 to less than \$7 million in 2007. Consider, too, that we now test twice as many students as we used to -- having expanded testing from grades 3, 6, 8, and 10 to grades, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Yet, remediation funding has been cut to less than one-third of its prior level.

The inherent problem is that funding for both testing and remediation programs come from a single combined appropriation in the budget bill. The more we spend on testing, the less there is for helping children by way of remediation programs. The more focus we place on testing company contracts and new test development, the fewer resources we have to help Indiana eliminate the academic achievement gap that exists among subpopulations of students.

The 2007 General Assembly made its intentions clear by supporting increased remediation funding. Indicated in the final school formula run distributed to legislators in April, K-9 remediation was increased by \$7.5 million, or 84 percent. Yet, because of the combined line item in the budget bill and because of the potential for increased testing costs due to the new test system, the security of those remediation funds is in jeopardy.

It is my hope that these same spring ISTEP proponents, who will now likely move on to a new issue, join me in securing not only those remediation funds but also adequate and additional resources to help Hoosier children most in need. If anything is "long overdue," remediation funding is it.